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TAGS: KFRD ASEC CVIS CPAS CMGT KCRM KE

SUBJECT: ARMENIANS IN KENYA - PASSPORTS AND OFFICIAL ID

REF: A: Nairobi 2616

B: Nairobi 1187

C: Nairobi 1023

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Reftels describe the exploits of the Armenian "Artur brothers," Artur Margaryan and Artur Sargsyan, who were hastily deported from Kenya after attempting to clear a colleague from Kenyan Customs and Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA) at gunpoint. News reports stated that a subsequent raid of the Armenian deportees' house in the fashionable Runda neighborhood of Nairobi revealed that the Armenians gained two Kenyan passports, official documentation falsely describing them as Kenyan Deputy Commissioners of Police, and access cards allowing them unrestricted access to all Kenyan airports. The diplomatic corps in Kenya agrees tat the Armenians' armed shenanigans at JKIA as well as their illegal possession of passports and other official credentials suggests that there remain serious document and physical security concerns at JKIA, the Ministry of Immigration, and the Kenyan Police Forces. END SUMMARY.

ARMENIANS "ISSUED" WITH STOLEN KENYAN PASSPORTS

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¶2. (SBU) On June 13 in a Special Session of Parliament, Immigration Minister Gideon Konchella explained that on May 3, 2006 three blank passports were stolen from Immigration's Nyayo House "strong room" by a cleaning lady. She reportedly stole passport numbers A1031194, A1031195, and A1031196 on behalf of unknown persons described as "Somalis" who paid her 500 Kenyan Shillings, or about \$7 to do the deed. In the subsequent raid on the home of newly-deported Armenian "Artur brothers" (reftels), a contact at Kenyan immigration confirmed that police uncovered passports number A1031195 and A1031196 whose biographical pages now described the Armenians as Kenyan nationals named Arman Sarkissyan and Artak Darkisyan.

¶3. (SBU) Disconcerting news reports suggest that these

freshly completed passports appear to be signed by the required principal immigration officer. The third blank passport remains missing according to the Immigration Minister. Subsequent media reports have clouded the waters, suggesting that the passports in the Armenians' possession were forged and not the stolen blank passports; however, given the Minister's statements in Parliament, this appears unlikely. Other reports suggest the passports were diplomatic; however, the number sequence suggests they are of a standard series, which was also confirmed by an Immigration Ministry source.

"BROTHERS" NOT IN THE BROTHERHOOD GET POLICE CREDENTIALS

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¶4. (SBU) Reports on other seized documents revealed that the Armenians were in possession of falsely obtained certificates of appointment describing them as Deputy Commissioners of Police. Such documents can only be issued with the authority of the Commissioner of Police, Unit Commander, or Provincial Police Chief according to Kenyan law. How the Artur "mercenaries" obtained these documents remains unknown.

ARTURS' AIRPORT PASSES ISSUED WITHOUT AUTHORITY

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¶5. (SBU) The Armenians' armed threats of Customs officials at JKIA, which precipitated the Armenians' high-profile expulsion, revealed that they were in possession of airport passes issued by the Government of Kenya allowing them unrestricted access without having to clear security. Such passes are only issued under the authority of the Kenya Airports Authority. The passes in question are generally very difficult to obtain via official channels. Newspaper reports state that they are not even issued to Cabinet Ministers. The source or authority by which the Armenians gained the access cards remains unknown.

DIPLOMATIC CORPS UP IN ARMS OVER ARMENIANS

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¶6. (SBU) A/DCM and CG attended an EU meeting in which the British Charge presented two diplomatic notes issued to the Kenyan Government calling for clarity on the Armenian issue. The British government is gravely concerned about the presence of the armed Armenians in restricted areas at JKIA, which may reflect negatively on the UK's travel advisory for Kenya and potentially on the continuation of British Airways flights into Nairobi, since the security lapse is a serious threat to the numerous British nationals visiting and residing in Kenya. The British Charge also expressed concern at the number of airport security passes that may have been issued improperly, and the unwillingness of the GoK to respond forthrightly to his government's notes. The Polish representative in Nairobi seconded the concerns, stating that the Armenian airport tomfoolery negatively impacted their travel advisory. The diplomatic corps members present agreed to file a formal demarche with the GoK to demand a full explanation of the issue.

COMMENT

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¶7. (SBU) The saga of the Armenians in Kenya reveals that there remain serious concerns over the control of and access to official documents. That blank passports can be stolen with ease from the Ministry of Immigration is one serious concern, but that official documents can be fraudulently obtained is a greater concern and hints at the pervasive corruption extent in the Kenyan Ministry of Immigration, Port Authority, and Police. Malfeasance by Kenyan authorities in document control and issuance further undermines the credibility of Kenya's document security and complicates Nairobi's consular responsibilities, particularly in regards to document verification.

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